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The University of Montana

NEWS RELEASE

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Oct. 13, 1994

UM PROFESSOR WINS NATIONAL HUMANITIES AWARD

MISSOULA --

University of Montana English Professor William Kittredge is one of five Americans selected to receive the 1994 Charles Frankel Prize in the Humanities, the White House and the National Endowment for the Humanities announced Thursday, Oct. 13.

Kittredge, an acclaimed author and former director of UM's creative writing program, will receive the award from President Bill Clinton in an afternoon ceremony on the South Lawn of the White House Friday, Oct. 14. Past winners of the award, established in 1989, include author Eudora Welty, filmmaker Ken Burns and Librarian of Congress Emeritus Daniel J. Boorstin.

"It's very gratifying and rewarding," Kittredge said. "I'm stunned that a Westerner would get it, and obviously very pleased."

Other 1994 winners of the Frankel Prize are Ernest L. Boyer, president of the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching; southern literature scholar Peggy Whitman Prenshaw; Sharon Percy Rockefeller, former president of Washington, D.C.'s WETA public broadcasting station; and librarian Dorothy Porter Wesley, who developed Howard University's black studies archives into one of the nation's most important collections of African-Americana.

"I owe a great debt to Margaret Kingsland, as everyone in the state does," Kittredge said.

Kingsland, executive director of the NEH-affiliated Montana Committee for the Humanities, nominated Kittredge for the prize and expressed delight at his selection.

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Kittredge's writing has contributed greatly to national understanding of the West as region and as myth, Kingsland said, and "he has been exceedingly generous" in promoting and participating in public humanities programs -- from major conferences and projects such as "The Last Best Place" literary anthology to presentations in small towns throughout the West.

"He is a superb example of the scholar whose reading, reflection, conversation and writing have led to important new ways of conceptualizing a major body of material -- in this instance the whole (and beloved) myth of the American West," Kingsland said in her letter nominating Kittredge. "His scholarship in the areas of Western literature, history and culture has helped to shape 'the new social history' of the West and to create entirely new, fresh and challenging interpretations of Western literature and film."

A UM faculty member since 1969, Kittredge has published 15 books that range from personal essays to Western novels. His major works include the memoir "Hole in the Sky," the essay collection "Owning It All," and the short story collections "We Are Not in This Together" and "The Van Gogh Field and Other Stories." He co-edited the Montana anthology "The Last Best Place" -- and originated that oft-repeated title -- and has published dozens of stories and essays in anthologies and national magazines including Time, Atlantic Monthly, Esquire and Rolling Stone. His screenwriting credits include the 1979 film "Heartland" and the screen adaptation of Norman Maclean's "A River Runs Through It." He served as associate producer for "A River Runs Through It" and the 1988 film "Peacock's War," which aired on public television's "Nature" series and won grand prizes at the Telluride and Snowbird film festivals.

Kittredge won UM's Distinguished Scholar Award in 1993; in 1988 he won the H.G.

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Merriam Award for Literature and was co-recipient of the MCH's Humanist of the Year award.

"Hole in the Sky" won the PEN West Award for the best nonfiction book of 1992.

Friday's White House awards ceremony and evening dinner will honor winners of the Frankel Prize and the National Medal of the Arts as part of National Arts and Humanities Month.

"These extraordinary and talented individuals have borne eloquent testimony to the enduring power of the arts and the humanities in our everyday lives," President Clinton said in a news release. "They have contributed profoundly to the richness and variety of our nation's cultural life, and so it is with enormous gratitude that we pay them national tribute."

The Frankel Prize commemorates Charles Frankel, whose varied career included service as a Columbia University philosophy professor, assistant secretary of state for educational and cultural affairs, and the first director of the National Humanities Center in North Carolina. Frankel died in 1979.

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Contact: Duane DeBruyne, NEH assistant director for media relations, (202) 606-8449. Both Kittredge and Kingsland will attend the Washington, D.C., ceremony. Kingsland, (406) 243-6022, will return to her office Monday. Kittredge will be back in his office Tuesday, (406) 243-4963.

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